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Achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, as well as implementing the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits: progress made, challenges and opportunities

Social and human rights questions: human rights

Letter dated 11 August 2005 from the Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

I have the honour to refer to my letter of 16 November 2004 to Marjatta Rasa, former President of the Economic and Social Council, in which I informed her that the Committee on World Food Security had endorsed the Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security. I am now pleased to confirm that the Council of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), at its 127th session, held from 22 to 27 November 2004, subsequently also endorsed the Voluntary Guidelines. Approval of the Voluntary Guidelines marks the first time that an intergovernmental body has agreed on the implications of the right to food for government policies and how to implement such an approach. The approval therefore constitutes a major breakthrough in advancing more generally the application of the principles enshrined in economic, social and cultural rights.

The Voluntary Guidelines are a practical tool to facilitate Government's efforts to implement the right to food, and cover the full range of actions that need to be taken at the national level to build an enabling environment for people to feed themselves in dignity and to establish appropriate safety nets for those who are unable to do so. The Guidelines will serve to empower the poor and hungry to claim their rights and, in this context, are also a tool for achieving the outcomes of the World Food Summit and the Millennium Development Goals. The Guidelines will be useful to FAO and to other United Nations agencies responding to the request by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to "strengthen human rights-related actions at country level".

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The Voluntary Guidelines were elaborated over the last two years through negotiations held within an Intergovernmental Working Group established for this purpose by the FAO Council in November 2002. Various non-governmental stakeholders and intergovernmental organizations, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the North-South Alliance, which is a coalition of a large number of NGOs, contributed significantly to the preparation of the Guidelines (see http://www.fao.org/righttofood/en/23413/highlight_51802en.html).

I should appreciate it if you would inform the membership of the Economic and Social Council and all the concerned stakeholders of the adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines by the FAO Council through the issuance of the present letter as a document of the Economic and Social Council.

(*Signed*) Jacques **Diouf**